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The starting point for innovation in higher education must include assessment, evaluation, and description of the present situation. A national study of what constitutes the core values of American academic life today should be undertaken. In the evaluation of innovation, it is important to broaden the unit being studied to include legislators and taxpayers, as well as students, faculty and administrators. Innovations proposed must be considered in light of their impact on all participants. The quality of the educational experience rather than the amount of specific information transmitted should be evaluated. Related documents are EA 002 536 and EA 002 551. (MLF)

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COMMENTS ON PROFESSOR TROW'S PAPER ENTITLED "METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN THE EVALUATION OF INNOVATION"

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COMMENTS ON PROFESSOR TROW'S PAPER ENTITLED 'METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN THE EVALUATION OF INNOVATION"

David Nasatir

The overwhelming sense that I get from this Conference, and in part from Professor Trow's paper, is the punch line of the joke that ends up, "You can't get there from here." In the case of evaluation I am not at all sure where is "there" that I want to get to, and I am certainly not sure where is the "here" where we are. I do not know what the starting state we have at hand is; and if I cannot adequately describe the context in which I am innovating, I have serious problems about exporting that innovation in some other context. Professor Trow's remarks, although cast in the collegiate vein, are in fact very applicable to the problems of introducing and promoting innovation in general. Value innovation in the educational enterprise may take place at all levels; the problems associated with the politics of innovation are not peculiar to the university. It is necessary to consider explicitly the latent functions of the routines of everyday classroom life.

The need for assessing, evaluating and describing the present situation in which an experiment will be performed, is a pressing one. It points out very quickly the inappropriateness of the experimental model of research for what is in fact a descriptive task. It is very difficult to make prescriptions for innovation when you cannot adequately define all the relevant conditions.

In addition to describing the starting point for innovation we should--as Professor Trow suggested--also study the side effects. This brings us very quickly to the question of criterion variables, for one man's criterion variables are another man's side effects. An increase in reading scores produced by an experimental technique may be of less importance in determining adoption than problems of classroom behavior generated by adoption of the experimental technique.

A second point raised by Professor Trow with ramifications for the evaluation of educational innovation in the curriculum area has to do with the time perspective. It often appears that educational planners take for granted that the future is quite nebulous, that we do not really know what the world is going to be like, that we are very unsure of the kinds of skills that are going to be needed in the future and consequently become somewhat immobilized. How far away is the future? What is the time perspective that must be brought to bear? If we presume that future society is going to be much like today, I think Martin Trow's comments, while delightful, reveal a personal bias which I personally would not share. It is a strong assumption that the core values of the faculty and the students engaged in education, including higher education in America today, are those of providing and acquiring a liberal education.

This is an empirical question, and it is my feeling that the overwhelming values are not liberal but vocational. While I share

the valuation of liberal education, I do not think that is truly widespread at the moment. Someone should certainly do a study of what constitute the core values of American academic life today. Such a study should be national in scope and include students as well as faculty and administrators. It might not be a bad idea to include legislators and taxpayers as well.

I doubt that many people experience the kind of liberal education that Professor Trow is talking about. Those who do make up the liberal education establishment, and those who control the possibility of change actually appear relatively content. They are not tempted by problems of assessment. I will return to this point, because I think it is suggestive of the importance of broadening the unit being studied in order to include not just the student, but all of the participants in the educational endeavor. You will recall Professor Trow suggesting that many of the innovations that we see are innovations which amuse the innovators and, I suspect, many of us who are engaged in education. Some who are engaged in educational innovation do so only because it is amusing, because it is interesting; were that possibility denied us, we would turn our attention to more diverting things.

Recently in a policy decision dealing with retention of some computer hardware at a research center at Berkeley, the issue was phrased, "If we don't have the toys, we can't keep the programmers."

If we do not have the toys with which innovators can amuse themselves, they cannot be kept around.

If we now make the opposite assumption that social patterns of the future are not going to be as they are today, then Professor Trow's concerns are much more germane. We already see a tremendous expansion of formal education toward a point where it becomes coterminous with life itself. This fact is evident when we look at the life style of graduate students at many leading universities. Wives and children of the students are immersed in the educational context; they live on the campus or in its environs; their social, economic, religious, political, military, and vocational experiences are cast in terms of the educational setting. And these conditions may be continuous over periods of three, five, eight, or even fifteen or more years at a time.

It is not at all clear that there is a distinction between educational life and "real" life. As Professor Husek said to me one day when we were bicycling along the coast toward Malibu, "I don't know what you're in training for, but this is the event so far as I'm concerned." Students are not in training. This <u>is</u> the event.

Similarly, because of a concern of social scientists and many others, we see the reaching out of formal education to envelop the young child and to provide in the educational setting almost

a total definition of his life. Even at present more than a third of a person's life--this is for the bulk of the population of the United States--is spent in education. Educational enterprise is the setting for life experiences, and I suspect this will be true increasingly, not only in the numbers of people involved but in the scope of their involvement.

Now it may be that organizational differentiation in the future will remove some of the overwhelmingly vocational character of contemporary education. Many of today's problems may be solved by a development of highly specialized educational organizations. As the rate of technological change increases, the length of time that a given skill is useful will diminish. Education, even for the most vocational, will never be finished, and we may expect schools to be reorganized so that dropping out--and dropping in--is the normal rather than the deviant pattern of attendance. Even the near future is sufficiently vague, the probability of rapid technological and social changes sufficiently great, and the variety of alternative social arrangements so large that those who wish to emphasize the transmission of specific, readily measurable knowledge might wish to hesitate a little bit and consider the merits of what they are doing. If we were to view the future as something different from a continuation of present arrangements, we might redefine the problem of evaluation of instruction to look, instead, at the side effects. We would want to evaluate the quality of the educational

experience itself rather than the amount of specific information transmitted. We would want to look at the delight engendered by the participants in the process of learning rather than in what is learned. If education is going to become an all-pervasive element of everyday life and if we are going to be the technocrats who manipulate it, we should concern ourselves with the quality of the educational experience itself in humane terms.

Who are the participants in this endeavor? Professor Trow has pointed out that it is folly even for the most narrow-minded of innovators in the technology of education to confine their considerations only to those things affecting the students. It is folly because the real world does not operate that way. Whatever innovations are to be proposed must be considered in light of their impact on all participants in the enterprise. This consideration determines, in large measure, the likelihood of adoption in the real situation; it also establishes the range of parameters to be considered in evaluating the worth of the innovation. It is necessary for educational researchers to make manifest many of the functions which the school performs. Often, these are in conflict with basic values school administrators hold about the ideal nature of the educational enterprise. It becomes necessary, for example, to make manifest the amusement value of innovation for those involved and to include these considerations in the cost-benefit analysis repertoire Professor

Alkin has put forth. It becomes necessary, in order to anticipate the kinds of reactions and degree of recalcitrance that may be displayed by students, faculty, parents, and administrators, to consider the school's role in socializing children to middle-class values when promoting innovations which would tend to undermine this function. Similarly, the innovator must consider its role in the process of social mobility or in courtship, for example.

If we "can't get there from here," where might we go instead? It might be better not to try getting anywhere until we know what it is we are after. So I come back, really, to my original point: instead of studying the evaluation of instructional programs we might better concern ourselves with optimizing the deployment of our scarce educational resources. Central to this task is a consideration of the existential quality of life in the classroom, in addition to any ill-defined, difficult to measure, putative outcomes for which we have little certainty of their future utility.

Thus, in order to evaluate the study of instructional programs you really have to take the instructional program itself as the dependent variable. This does not mean just those things which you choose to manipulate or control because they are easy to manipulate or control, but those things which are actually going on, whether desirable or undesirable. It is important to note the differences between the model program and its actual operation.

In order to rationalize the production of innovations and their evaluation, it is vital that we take into account the interaction of

contextual along with the experimental variables. The problem is that we do not have a well developed theory which allows us to go very far in the quantitative specification of types of contexts. With this shortcoming we unfortunately expend our scarce resources doing that which is somewhat easier to do, simply because we have methods developed for it, not because the proposed innovations lead necessarily to a more desirable end. What must be done, then, is to begin work on the assessment of instructional programs in their totality rather than focusing upon the minor aspects of them that correspond to existing curricular divisions.